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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000375

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL I2

SUBJECT: THE AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALL ON ACTING PARLIAMENT SPEAKER ATTIYA

Classified by Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During the Ambassador's farewell call at the Iraqi parliament, acting speaker Khalid Attiya expressed pleasure over the success of the provincial elections, regretted the continuing impasse over the parliamentary speakership, but predicted progress on the budget, the principal pending legislative item. Attiya observed that the provincial elections had resonated at the national level and thought the campaign for the late 2009 national elections had "already started." End summary.

¶2. (C) Attiya expressed pleasure with the outcome of the January 31 provincial elections, declaring them a "big victory for the Iraqi people." Attiya regretted the continuing impasse of the speakership in the parliament, but "that's democracy," he mused. (Competing factions have been deadlocked in efforts to choose a new Speaker since Mahmoud Mashhadani was removed December 23 - septels). Attiya expressed confidence "someone acceptable to all" would be found in the near future.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador expressed concern that the speakership vacancy was delaying parliamentary action on the GOI's budget. Attiya expected parliament to act swiftly after the speakership question is resolved. The controversial quota of oil revenue provided to the autonomous Kurdish region, currently set at 17 % of total petroleum revenues, "has been resolved," Attiya asserted, implying that the 17% figure may be adjusted following the results of a national census planned for October.

¶4. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question, Attiya opined that the results of the January 31 provincial elections were likely to have an impact on the balance of political coalitions at the national level. Prime Minister Maliki's State of Law list had made major gains, he continued, noting that in provinces such as Basra, its 38% share of the vote could translate into 50% or more of the seats in the provincial council. With the results of the provincial elections, "the campaign for the national elections (due in late 2009) has already begun," Attiya underlined.

¶5. (C) Attiya asked whether the Obama administration was likely to adjust the current timetable for withdrawal of U.S. forces. The Ambassador underlined that the President was well aware of the progress achieved in Iraq and would not take any steps that might jeopardize it. Attiya expressed satisfaction, observing that Iraqis were now finally beginning to feel the progress achieved in recent years.

¶6. (C) "Iraq is back, internally and externally," the Ambassador observed, praising the GOI's constructive role at the recent Arab League Economic Summit in Kuwait. However, not all governments in the region are pleased by Iraq's democratic progress, the Ambassador added. Attiya agreed: Iraq's experience will influence the whole region, he asserted.

¶7. (C) Looking to the future, Attiya hoped the coming period would be a time of rededication to implementing fully Iraq's constitution. The near total absence of central government representation within the Kurdistan Regional Government was unnatural, he opined. Regions and Federalism should be able to coexist. In any case, we know we cannot impose solutions, they must be achieved through joint action and agreement, he concluded.

CROCKER